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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of special educators must always be to optimize the instruction given to low-performing students. The amount of teacher-directed instruction that low-performing students receive is directly related to their achievement. To maximize the amount of teacher-directed instruction, small and large group instruction is recommended. Lessons should include three components: an opening, a body, and a close. The opening of the lesson involves gaining the students' attention, reviewing critical prior knowledge, and stating the goal of the lesson. The body of the lesson encompasses modeling the new skill and providing guided practice of the new skill through prompting and checking. The close of the lesson includes a review of information, a preview of the next lesson, and introduction of independent work. To increase the attention and accuracy of students, the teacher should use such delivery skills as eliciting frequent responses from the learners, providing appropriate feedback on correct and incorrect responses, and maintaining the attention of the learners. (JDD)

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DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF LESSONS

A PAPER PRESENTED AT

THE 1989 COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN CONVENTION

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The history of Special Education has been marked by a series of questions and a continuing search for answers. **WHO are special education students?** What students are eligible for special education? What is a viable definition for learning disabilities? What assessment tools and criteria should be used to determine eligibility? **WHERE should special needs students be served?** In self-contained classrooms? In pull-out programs? In regular classrooms? In integrated models? In peer tutoring programs? **WHAT should they be taught?** Basic skills? Learning strategies? Organization skills? Social skills? Career and vocational skills? How should these be translated into IEP goals and objectives?

While these are critical questions, for which we as special educators must continually search for answers recognizing that the answers are likely to change as quickly as our society, we must take care not to remove our attention from the essence of special education: the **QUANTITY** and **QUALITY** of **INSTRUCTION** provided special needs students. No matter WHO we teach, WHERE we teach, or WHAT we teach, we must optimize the instruction given to low-performing students. This must always be our prime goal. It must never be set aside in the pursuit of other answers.

The amount of teacher-directed instruction that low performing students receive is directly related to their achievement for many reasons. First, students are more attentive when the teacher is teaching than when they are working independently. Second, low-performing students learn with greater ease when information is explicitly presented and immediate feedback is provided. Despite the importance of teacher-directed instruction, special education students often get less not more instruction than their regular classroom peers. This is often due to the delivery systems selected for special

needs students: individual instruction and independent study. If the teacher selects to teach each student individually, the total amount of teacher-directed instruction that each student receives is significantly reduced. To maximize the amount of teacher-directed instruction, a more effective and efficient procedure is to provide small and large group instruction . A total reliance on independent study is an equally poor choice for low-performing students. They not only can not discover information without input, but they are not as attentive or on-task during independent work. This is not to say that independent work is not an appropriate adjunct to teacher-directed instruction, it simply is not a substitute.

Not only should special education services be dominated by teacher-directed instruction, but the quality of that instruction should be optimized. The lessons should be well designed and delivered in a manner that actively involves students and maintains their attention. This paper discusses the design and delivery of instruction to low-performing students.

DESIGN OF LESSONS

While there are many models of lesson design, the model developed by the Council for Exceptional Children's Academy for Effective Instruction is particularly well adapted to the needs of special education students. Using this model, the lesson would include three components: an **opening**, a **body**, and a **close**

OPENING OF THE LESSON

At the beginning of any lesson, the teacher should gain the **ATTENTION** of his/her students. This can be done by giving a verbal prompt or cue such as *"Listen" "We are going to begin.." or ""Class, look here."* To be effective, the verbal prompt should be followed by silence and eye contact as the teacher waits for student attention. If the initial cue is not successful, the teacher can

repeat the cue, praise students who are attending, move closer to students having difficulty attending and/or prompt an individual student.

As a part of the opening, the teacher should also **REVIEW** any preskills or prior knowledge critical to the content of the new lesson. For example, if the teacher is introducing two digit division, a review of the steps in one digit division (*Divide, Multiply, Subtract, Bring Down*) would be useful. If the teacher is introducing time telling to five minutes, a review of counting by fives would be appropriate. This review can be accomplished by selecting specific preskills for systematic review or, in some cases , by checking independent work or homework from the prior lesson.

Finally, the teacher should state the **GOAL** of this lesson. This statement should be clear and direct so that students understand what they are to attend to during the lesson. For example, the teacher might state: *"Today, we are going to learn how to record assignments on a calendar." "In this lesson, you will learn how to write a paragraph that includes a topic sentence and related details."* In many cases the goal should be accompanied with a statement of the relevance of the skill or strategy that addresses WHY the skill is important, WHEN the skill can be used, and WHERE it might be used. When introducing a strategy for proofreading, the teacher might state the goal and relevance in the following manner. *"Today you are going to learn a strategy for proofreading your papers. When you proofread, you find and fix up your mistakes. If you carefully find and fix up all your mistakes, the writer will better understand what you are saying. You will also get higher grades on assignments if you correct the errors. You can use this strategy when you complete assignments in school, when you write a letter, or even a note to someone. Tell me some of things that you write that you should proofread.. --- You can use this strategy in this class, in your other classes, at home and in the*

future on a job. Think of places where you write things that should be proofread." The statement of relevance not only increases students' motivation and their subsequent attention to the content of the lesson, but increases the probability of generalization which is particularly important when teaching learning strategies, organization skills, social skills and vocational skills.

BODY OF THE LESSON

When teaching a new skill, the teacher should not just describe the skill, but should actually **MODEL** the new skill. Whether the skill is a simple basic skill such as saying a word, spelling a word, writing a cursive letter, or using a strategy to solve an addition fact, or a more complex skill such as writing a paragraph, starting a conversation, or applying a learning strategy to the reading of a textbook, a systematic, dynamic model is critical for the learner. The teacher should proceed step by step, showing and telling students about each step in the strategy or skill. If the step in the strategy is covert, the teacher should make the step overt by describing what he/she is thinking. The wording used in the demonstration should be clear and consistent. If the demonstration is long, the teacher should elicit responses from the students to increase their attentiveness and to verify understanding. This can be done by having students answer questions based on their prior knowledge or by asking students to repeat information that has just been presented. If the strategy is particularly difficult, the demonstration can be repeated, though numerous demonstrations will not be as powerful as prompting students in the use of the skill or strategy.

Following the model, the teacher should provide guided practice of the new skill or strategy. When working with special students, guided practice can be divided into two types: **PROMPT** and **CHECK**, or a lead and test, as they are often referred to in the literature.

During the **PROMPT**, the teacher assists the students in performing the skill or strategy to ensure that initial practice is successful practice. The prompt can be accomplished by the teacher performing the skill at the **same time** as his/her students(e.g., *"Say the word with me." "Say the fact with me."*) or through the use of **verbal prompts** (e.g., *"Your turn to write a cursive p. Up, down, up, around and finish." "Let's proofread the next sentence together.. What do we check first?* sense *Touch each word and say it with me. The boys was going to the store. Does that sentence make sense?* no *What did the writer mean to say?* The boys were gong to the store. *Good, cross out was and write were above it..*") Using either procedure, the prompting should continue until students are performing the skill consistently without errors.

After the prompt step of the lesson, the teacher should **CHECK** students understanding by having them perform the skill without assistance (e.g., *"Say the word by yourselves." "Continue to make the letter s." "Proofread the next sentence. Correct any errors."*) During the check, the teacher should continue to carefully monitor all responses, providing corrections as needed and positive feedback. Students should be given a number of successful trials on the skill or strategy.

While MODEL, PROMPT and CHECK can occur in quick succession (e.g., *"This word is against. Say the word with me. What word?"*), on more complex strategies, these steps might extend over a number of days. For example, when teaching a long division strategy, the teacher might model and prompt on the first day. On the second day, the model might be repeated with many additional items prompted. On the third day, the model could be faded, with items prompted and checked. On the fourth day, the number of prompted items might be reduced and the number of items checked increased. This sequence

would of course depend on student performance and thoughtful teacher decisions.

CLOSE OF THE LESSON

The lesson should not only have a formal opening but a formal close. The close of the lesson can include a **REVIEW** of the critical information presented in the lesson (e.g., *"Today you learned a strategy for proofreading your written work. First, you check for _____. sense. Next, you check for _____. capitals. Next, you check for _____. punctuation Next, you check for _____. spelling. Why is it important to proofread all written products that someone else will need to read? ---When can you use this strategy?"*) It is also wise to include a **PREVIEW** of the next lesson. (e.g., *"Tomorrow, we are going to practice locating and correcting spelling errors."*). The preview provides students and teachers with a road map to future instruction: both parties know where the instruction is going and that a logical path is being followed. Finally, teacher can introduce **INDEPENDENT WORK**, seatwork to be completed in class or homework. Since the purpose of independent work is to provide successful practice (90% accuracy) that builds proficiency and fluency, independent work should only be given on skills that students have demonstrated a high level of proficiency on during group instruction.

DELIVERY OF LESSONS

While the design of the lesson is critical, it is also important that the teacher use delivery skills that increase the attention and accuracy of students. During the lesson, the teacher should 1) elicit frequent responses from the learners, 2) provide appropriate feedback on correct and incorrect responses.and 3) maintain the attention of the learners.

ELICIT FREQUENT RESPONSES

Of the many presentation or delivery skills, the most important is active participation, the eliciting of frequent responses during the teacher-directed lesson. The teacher needs to continually check for student understanding so that he/she can adjust the lesson as necessary, presenting new information or examples if students are successful or repeating information if they are incorrect. Active participation is also important to the learner. If responses are consistently elicited, the student will be more attentive to the instruction and will have an opportunity to practice the critical information.

True active participation goes beyond one or two responses during the lesson. While the number of responses that could be elicited depends on the type of response (e.g., Written responses will take longer.) and the complexity of the responses (e.g., It will take longer to answer an inferential comprehension question than an literal comprehension question.), the teacher should ask students to say, write or do something a number of times during each minute of the lesson. A pattern of input-response-input-response-input-response should be adopted during teacher-directed instruction.

While the amount of active participation is more critical than the type of response gained, there are a number of response types that are particularly useful. First, the teacher can ask students to say answers as a group, to a partner or individually. Group oral responses can be used when the response is short and the wording is the same across learners (e.g., *"Which branch of the government makes the the laws?"* the legislative branch *"What are the four steps in our memorization strategy?"* Read, Cover, Recite, Check.) To ensure that students do not lag behind and copy other students' responses, the teacher should use some type of cue or signal. For example, the teacher might ask a question, raise his/her hand to indicate thinking time, and then

lower his/her hand to cue students to respond. If signals are carefully taught and consistently used, quick, group oral responses can be used when teaching students of all ages.

The teacher could also ask students to tell a partner a response (e.g., *"Ones, tell your partner the definition of natural resources and two examples of a natural resource." "Twos, tell your partner the definition for renewable resources. Tell your partner two examples of renewable resources.")* Partner responding is most efficient if the teacher carefully selects the partners, matching lower performing students with middle performing students, and assigns the partners numbers (one and two) so that these directives can be given. As partners respond, the teacher should carefully monitor to ensure on-task behavior. It is also helpful for students to indicate when they have finished the response by looking at the teacher. When all students are done, the teacher should provide feedback on the correct response. While partner responding can be used with all groups of learners, it is particularly powerful when working with middle school and high school students.

The teacher may also select to call on individual students for an oral response. This is particularly appropriate when the response wording is long or different across learners, making group oral responses impossible, or when the teacher wishes to verify individual learning. The most common practice when asking for individual oral responses is to call a student's name, pose the question, listen to the answer and then to give feedback on the response. However, if this practice is used, the other students are unlikely to attend after a student's name is called. Instead, the teacher should: 1) pose the question, 2) raise his/her hand to stop blurting, 3) give thinking time for all students, 4) make eye contact with students as they formulate answers, 5) call on a student, 6) listen to his/her response and 6) provide feedback. If this procedure is used,

ALL students will attend to the question, formulate an answer and attend to their peer's answer as well as the teacher feedback. As a result, an individual response can be changed into a group response with all students participating.

During the lesson, the students can also be asked to write responses. Some content areas necessitate written responses during teacher-directed instruction (e.g., spelling, mathematics, handwriting, written expression), while all content areas can be adapted to accommodate written responses (e.g. social studies - "Write the three branches of the federal government on your concept map."; science - "Write the definition for natural resource on your paper.") The major difficulty when using written responses is the differential response time across students. To reduce waiting time, written responses during teacher-directed instruction, should be short and students should be given a response to indicate completion (e.g., "Put your pencils down and look up when you are done.") While most responses are written on paper, the use of slates and similar materials permits displaying of the responses and subsequent teacher monitoring.

Students can also be asked to DO something during the lesson. For example, they can indicate answers using hand signals (e.g., "Put one finger up for executive branch, two fingers for legislative branch and three fingers for judicial branch) or by displaying a response card (e.g., "Listen to the story problem. Then, hold up the card that shows the correct operation.") Students can also be asked to place their finger or pencil on a specific part of the instructional stimulus (e.g., "Put your finger on the title of the story." "Touch the directions." "Put your pencil next to Box A on the concept map.") Touching or pointing responses can be used to bring students' attention to critical stimuli and also allow the teacher to monitor student attention.

Of all the presentation skills, the authors are convinced that active participation is the most powerful in improving lesson delivery. Active participation increases students' attention and rehearsal of the lesson information. When teachers elicit responses throughout the lesson, the structure of the lesson improves and the lesson can be adjusted based on student performance.

MONITOR RESPONSES AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS

During the lesson, the teacher must be constantly aware of students' responses. The teacher must listen carefully to students' oral responses, especially when group oral responses are used. In addition, the teacher must carefully monitor written responses and "doing" responses so that correct responses can be acknowledged and errors can be corrected.

Correct responses. When a student or group of students make a correct response on an easy or a previously mastered item, the teacher should give limited praise (e.g., short verbal statement, nod of head, smile) and quickly move to the next input or question. Extensive praise on these items can actually slow the pace of the lesson. On the other hand, if the student makes a correct but hesitant response, the teacher should praise the student, acknowledging the correct response and the effort of the student. Since hesitancy in responding may indicate that the student and his/her classmates may not be firm on the information, the teacher should reteach the information.

Incorrect responses. The handling of incorrect responses is a very important presentation skill both in terms of student gains and self-esteem. When an error occurs, some general guidelines can be followed. First, the teacher should correct the error with the student or the whole group, rather than "fish" for the answer from other students. Second, the correction should

be done in a businesslike manner that is neither too threatening, which will reduce the desire to respond in the future, or too reinforcing, which might encourage carelessness. Third, the correction should always result in the student making the correct response.

The actual correction procedure would depend on whether the teacher believes the error is a result of carelessness or a lack of knowledge. If the error is due to carelessness, the teacher should repeat the question, emphasizing the salient words within the question. If the error is due to lack of knowledge, the teacher should either tell the student the answer or prompt them in using the appropriate strategy. In all cases, the end result must be an accurate response from the student. To strengthen the correction procedure, the teacher should later return to the item and recheck the students.

MAINTAINING ATTENTION

In order to gain from the instructional lesson, the students must attend to the teacher and to their peers. While some students certainly have more difficulty attending, many teaching practices can increase attention. The teacher should utilize a brisk pace when presenting information and eliciting responses during the lesson. The teacher should model alertness and enthusiasm through body language and voice. In addition, the teacher should maintain close physical proximity to his/her students. When attention begins to wain, the teacher can adjust his/her instruction in responses to the following questions. Am I eliciting enough responses? Is the pace of the lesson brisk? Am I close enough to my students? Am I modeling alertness?

CONCLUSION

As a field, we are continually involved in answering the who, where and what questions of special education. We will probably be asking the same questions for years to come, with very different answers. But through all of

the debate, reform and new innovations, let's never forget the real essence of special education: QUALITY INSTRUCTION. Whether we are teaching in the self-contained classroom, the resource room or the regular classroom, we must focus on quality instruction. Whether we are teaching math, science, social skills, or learning strategies, our students will benefit from the dynamic presentation of structured lessons. In other words, let us all work to preserve the essence of our title: special education TEACHer.